

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 06001 081415Z

47

ACTION NEA-10

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INFO SITREP COLLECTIVE PRIORITY 0006

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 6001

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, PINS, PINT, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANESE SITUATION JULY 8: CHRISTIANS ADVANCE IN NORTH;

DIPLOMATIC INDICATIONS INAUSPICIOUS

REF: BEIRUT 5953

1. SUMMARY: CHRISTIAN COUNTEROFFENSIVE IN NORTH GAINS GROUND IN VERY INTENSIVE FIGHTING. BEIRUT CONFRONTATION LINE AND TELL ZAATAR AREA REMAIN NORMALLY HOT. SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN MEXICAN STANDOFFS CONTINUE IN SIDON AREA AND AROUND BEKAA CITIES. SEVERAL TRADITIONAL FRONTS ELSEWHERE ACTIVE. ARAB LEAGUE MEDIATION EFFORT STUMBLES, BUT LIBYAN PRIME MINISTER JALLOUD STILL ATTEMPTING AT LEAST ARRANGE SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN UNDERSTANDINGS. BOTH KFOUR FRONT AND PLO CONCERNED ABOUT SOVIET AND SYRIAN POSITIONS IN AFTERMATH OF KHADDAM VISIT TO MOSCOW. JUNBLATT INCREASINGLY OBSTREPEROUS, NOW SEEEMS UNWILLING EVEN TO TALK TO ADVERSARIES. RAYMOND EDDE "NATIONAL FRONT" PLANNING TO SEEK INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT. WEST BEIRUT LIVING CONDITIONS AT DANGEROUS LOWLEVEL AS PRESS SPEAKS OF "INSECURITY PSYCHOSIS."
END SUMMARY

2. FOCUS REMAINS ON NORTH LEBANON WHERE KEYNOTE IS
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 06001 081415Z

INCREASINGLY OBVIOUS SYRIAN/CHRISTIAN COLLABORATION. OPPOSING

RADIO STATIONS BROADCAST CONTRADICTORY REPORTS, BUT SYRIAN AND RIGHTIST FORCES APPEAR TO HAVE DEFINITELY CONSOLIDATED THEIR COUNTERATTACK NORTH OF CHEKKA/KFAR HAZIR/AMOUN, ALL OF WHICH ARE IN CHRISTIAN HANDS, THUS SECURING PRINCIPAL ACCESS ROUTE FROM CHRISTIAN HEARTLAND TO EMBATTLED CITY OF ZGHORTA. CHRISTIAN SOURCE HOWEVER ADMITS THAT PALESTINIANS TOOK SEVERAL HUNDRED MILITARY AND CIVILIAN PRISONERS IN CHEKKA. PRESS REPORTS VIOLENT FIGHTING AND ESTIMATES OVER 500 KILLED IN KOURA AREA DURING JULY 7, ESPECIALLY AROUND CHEKKA, AND LARGE SCALE TANK ASSAULTS SUPPORTED BY ARTILLERY IN OTHER AREAS OF NORTH. TRIPOLI/ZGHORTA ARE VERY ACTIVE. FIRES DUE TO SHELLING ALSO A MAJOR PROBLEM. PALESTINIAN/LEFTIST SIDE CLAIMS 15 SYRIANS HAVE DEFECTED WITH 15 ARMORED VEHICLES AND 10 RECOILLESS RIFLES. IF THERE IS ANY TRUTH TO THIS AND SIMILAR EARLIER REPORTS, ONE CAUSE MAY BE THAT MOST SYRIAN TROOPS ARE SUNNI MUSLIM, AS ARE PALESTINIANS, WHEREAS SYRIAN LEADERSHIP AND MANY ARMY OFFICERS ARE ALAWITE.

3. IN BEIRUT GIANT PORT FIRE CONTINUES. IN CENTRAL CITY, FIGHTING AND ARTILLERY EXCHANGES SOMEWHAT DECREASED JULY 7. IN SUBURBS, "SUICIDE RAIDS" CONTINUE BETWEEN CHIAH ANDAIN EL-RUMMANEH, AND COMBAT LEVEL REMAINS HIGH AT HADETH/LAYLAKE. ENTIRE AREA FROM NABAA TO DEKOUANE REMAINS ACTIVE WITH ARTILLERY FIRE CONTINUING IN TELL ZAATAR VICINITY, WHICH NOW SAID FOULED BY SCORES OF DECOMPOSING CADAVERS. SHORT TRUCE WAS CALLED JULY 7 TO PERMIT BULLDOZER TO CLOSE TRENCH NEAR TELL ZAATAR INTO WHICH SEVERAL DOZEN BODIES HAD BEEN THROWN. TELL ZAATAR SITUATION STAGNANT, ALTHOUGH PALESTINIANS CLAIM TO HAVE RETAKEN SHEPHERD MONASTERY NEAR CAMP. ONE CHRISTIAN OFFICIAL IN NORTH ADMITS THAT PALESTINIAN EFFORT THERE HAS FORCED REDEPLOYMENT OF CHRISTIAN FORCES NORTHWARD, DELAYING FALL OF TELL ZAATAR.

4. IN THE BEKAA, SYRIAN BLOCKADE OF BAALBEK AND HERMEL CONTINUES WITH SPORADIC ARTILLERY EXCHANGES AND FEARS EXPRESSED FOR SAFETY OF WORLD FAMOUS ROMAN TEMPLE COMPLEX. IN SOUTH, ARTILLERY EXCHANGES CONTINUE BETWEEN SIDON AND SYRIAN FORCES AT HILALIYYA. ZAHRANI REFINERY STILL NOT OPERATING, BUT EARLIER REPORTED DAMAGE NOW SAID TO BE MINIMAL AND COULD BE EASILY REPAIRED IF SYRIANS PERMIT. BOMBARDMENTS AND GROUND
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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 06001 081415Z

ACTION CONTINUE IN ALEY/KAHALE MOUNTAIN AREA.

5. NEGOTIATIONS UNDER ARAB LEAGUE SPONSORSHIP SCHEDULED AT SOFAR JULY 7 CANCELLED FOR SECOND TIME IN 48 HOURS AND AL SEC GEN MAHMOUD RIAD CONVENES JULY 12 AL FOREIGN MINISTERS' CONFERENCE, IN WHAT LOCAL PRESS DESCRIBES AS TACIT ADMISSION OF FAILURE. L'ORIENT LE JOUR ATTRIBUTES COLLAPSE TO PERSISTENCE OF COMBAT, CONTINUED SYRIAN PRESENCE IN

LEBANON, AND GROWING DISCONTENT OF KAMAL JUNBLATT. AL TEAM MEMBERS TUNISIAN FONMIN HABIB CHATTI AND BHARAINI FONMIN MOHAMMED BEN MOBARAK HAVE RETURNED HOME.

6. LIBYAN PREMIER JALLOUD PERSISTS IN OPTIMISM, MEETING JULY 7 IN BEIRUT WITH BOTH KAMAL JUNBLATT AND YASIR ARAFAT. JALLOUD HOPES AT LEAST THAT SYRIANS WILL WITHDRAW FROM SIDON AREA IN RETURN FOR REOPENING OF TWO SAIQA OFFICES IN BEIRUT. HE MAY RETURN TO DAMASCUS TODAY.

7. FOLLOWING MEETING WITH JALLOUD, JUNBLATT TOLD JOURNALISTS, "IF THE ISOLATIONISTS WISH TOTAL WAR, WE WILL SERVE IT TO THEM," AND AFTER MEETING PALESTINIAN LEADERS HE SAID, "SPEAK TO ME NO MORE OF A POLITICAL SOLUTION." ONE REPORT SAYS JUNBLATT IS NOW REFUSING EVEN TO CONFER WITH SYRIANS UNTIL LATTER HAVE COMPLETELY WITHDRAWN FORCES FROM LEBANON. HE ALSO SAID TO BE PLANNING TO APPOINT A "GOVERNOR" OF WEST BEIRUT AND TO RECONSTITUTE LEFTIST MILITIAS AS "ARMY" OF THE "NATIONAL MOVEMENT."

8. SOVIET AND SYRIAN POLITICAL POSITIONS CONCERN WARRING FACTIONS. KFOUR FRONT SUPPOSED TO MEET JULY 8 AT 1100 TO DISCUSS MESSAGE RECEIVED TWO DAYS AGO FROM PRESIDENT ASSAD. FRONT PLANS SEND DELEGATION TO DAMASCUS TO DISCUSS RESULTS OF MOSCOW VISIT OF FONMIN KHADDAM. FRONT MAY ALSO CONSIDER EFFORTS TO SEEK "INTERNATIONALIZATION" OF LEBANESE PROBLEM. SOVIET POSITION ALSO OF INTEREST TO ARAFAT, WHO REPORTEDLY WILL DEPART JULY 8 (IN BOAT FROM TYRE) FOR MOSCOW.

9. RAYMOND EDDE'S NEW "NATIONAL FRONT" REPORTED PLANNING ISSUE STATEMENT ANNOUNCING SUPPORT OF THREE PRINCIPLES AS BASIS OF PEACE SETTLEMENT: 1) COMPLETE SYRIAN MILITARY WITHDRAWAL; 2) NO PARTITION OR EVEN LESSER FORMS OF "REGIONALIZATION" OR "CONTONIZATION"; AND 3) RETURN TO CAIRO
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PAGE 04 BEIRUT 06001 081415Z

ACCORDS ON PALESTINIAN STATUS. "FRONT" REPORTED ALSO PLANNING ESTABLISH CONTACTS WITH ARAB AMBASSADORS, MESSAGES TO FOREIGN CHIEFS-OF-STATE, AND TO SEND DELEGATION(S) TO PRINCIPAL FOREIGN CAPITALS.

10. PRESS OF JULY 8 DESCRIBES LEBANON AS "EMBRACED BY FLAMES" EXCEPT IN AREAS "PACIFIED" BY SYRIA AND AREAS INACCESSIBLE TO ONE OR OTHER OPPOSING CAMPS. INCREASING VIOLENCE WHICH GRIPS COUNTRY CAUSING "INSECURITY PSYCHOSIS." INCREASING NUMBERS OF LEBANESE REPORTED TAKING THEIR FAMILIES OUT OF COUNTRY BY WHATEVER MEANS AVAILABLE AND AT ANY COST AS LIVING CONDITIONS IN BEIRUT DETERIORATE. TOTAL ABSENCE OF FUEL AND EXTREME SCARCITY OF DRINKING WATER IN WEST BEIRUT NOW DISTINCT POSSIBILITIES. YASIR ARAFAT REPORTEDLY HAS ORDERED SEIZURE OF UNRWA FLOUR STOCKS. WEST BEIRUT BANKS DENY THEY

ARE BEING CALLED UPON BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO REVEAL ACCOUNT
DATA.
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